

Central MRS Meeting Notes  
July 24th, 2008  
Moore County DSS

Counties Present: Alamance, Anson, Mecklenburg, Moore, Rockingham, Scotland, Union.

Introductions

Announcements – Children's Services

Shared Parenting

CFT Policy

CFT Observations

Moving Forward with MRS

Announcements

- MRS Institute!! Don't forget! Note - presenters will not count in your guaranteed three participants.
- JoAnn has announced her retirement effective November.
- Passed our IVE review.
- Policy changes – court chapter and CFT chapter have been approved. Still in the process of getting this information out to the counties. Part of the delay around the court chapter involves programming the new permanency plan code into the CPPS system (5094). The programming is out of the Division's control and we have to wait until it can be added.

Shared Parenting

Rick Zechman presented on this. The only thing that has really been in policy around SP was that you must have a meeting within 7 days. Wanted to flesh that out and include more information around Shared Parenting. Have been talking to trainers, foster care, licensing, and policy consultants. Took a lot of the material from the Shared Parenting training and incorporated it into this policy, which will be located in the Placement Manual. Wanted to get some information from this group about where you would like specific guidance.

- Want to provide some guidance around starting to have conversations with parents when it looks like a possibility that children will come into care.
- Want to acknowledge that children may want to maintain a relationship with the foster parents post permanency. This is ok, but need to plan for this from the get-go.

Comments

- Challenges with meeting the 7 day time frame.
  - The practical aspect of getting the worker to finish up all the required work after removal. If you are the worker who just removed 6 kids will continue to get assigned cases and then has to do court reports, etc. this is a challenge.
  - Locating the parents.
  - Transitioning from the removal worker to the foster care worker.

- Believe that the 7 days is too soon, feel like the birth and foster parents are not always ready to meet each other.
- Counties are still having trouble finding foster parents anyway, especially ones that are willing to meet the birth parents. Once the foster parents get the foster child they shut down and don't want to meet the birth parents.
- When the birth and foster parents are open and willing it is good to have the meeting as soon as possible and these tend to meet the 7 day time frame.
- A benefit to having the meeting soon is that the child gets to see both sets of parents together.
- One county has a lot of very young birth parents and they have a lot of attitude and resentment; they don't want to sit down and listen to anyone, DSS or foster parents. Particularly when the birth parents also have mental health issues.
- Foster parents fear that they have to have the birth parents in their home. This is not the case. One county has had them either come to DSS or the playground at the McDonalds, which is a neutral location. The DSS tells them this meeting must be arranged in the 7 days, and if they realize that meeting at McDonalds is ok, they are more receptive.
- The concern for the children and both sets of parents, is that the unknown is usually worse than knowing. More than 7 days is a long time for birth parents not to know who has their children. This is also stressful for the children, and it is better for the care of the children if the foster parents know the particulars of the children (hates fish, how to comfort when they wake up at night, etc.)
- It will mean a lot to the birth parent to realize that this foster parent is different from the DSS worker. This is the person who will be caring for their children, and if the birth parent can see that the foster parent is taking an interest in their child and wanting to know about them so that they can get the best care possible, this will help the birth parents feel better.
- Also helps older children behave better if they see that their mom and the foster parents are talking to each other. The older children then don't try to play the parents against each other and realize the foster parents are not out to "get" them.
- Put the case aside for this meeting – it is not about the plan, it is about letting these two sets of caregivers meet.
- It is helpful if you can have foster parents who are invested in Shared Parenting and have been successful at it come in and talk to the newer foster parents. Not professionals, but other foster parents "just like them".
- One county had a birth parent speak at MAPP class - told how although the last year was the most traumatic of his life but the foster parents had been wonderful and how Shared Parenting helped.
- What about involvement of any other relatives? Do counties do this, consider it, why or why not?

- One county only does this if the relative is the placement.
  - Another county has done it and it has worked well. It is a support for the birth parents, and the relative may mention something about the children that is helpful to the foster parents.
  - If a relative has been a caregiver of the children when they were with the birth parents, it may help the transition to involve them in the Shared Parenting Meetings.
- Remember that there are different degrees of Shared Parenting – the first meeting can be over the phone, at DSS, don't have to trade phone numbers, or even last names. You can stick a toe in rather than jump in head first.
- Counties here said that even if they had more time that they think the majority of them would happen fairly quickly but there are some that would not and they wouldn't get 'dinged' on the review. (This is not currently on the review.)
  - We need to think about what is best practice for the children and families involved, and if there is a legitimate reason for postponing it, document why it was delayed.
  - One suggestion is 14 days.
  - Another suggestion is to say "best practice is to have the meeting within 7 days, however if it cannot be done, the reason should be documented, but it must be done within XX days".
- Who facilitates the Shared Parenting meeting?
  - CPS workers, Foster Care workers, Licensing workers, some have a facilitator.
- How do counties prepare for post permanency?
  - One county didn't do anything formal, it was an agreement between the birth and foster parent where the Shared Parenting relationship led to the parents deciding to have the foster parents adopt. DSS is aware of the situation, but did not suggest the adoption.
- Starting to see that by using foster parents as a resource/mentor the birth parents end up finding their own solutions later on that otherwise would have resulted in a CPS report.
- Does any of this change when we start talking about relatives or group homes? Is there a role for care providers from group homes?
  - Believe that relatives do get engaged, but not so much group homes.
  - There is a meeting similar to CFT with the group homes. Parents are invited to take parenting classes with Baptist Children's Home and there is a monthly meeting similar to CFT.
  - The role of residential care is adapting to the changes in foster care in general, but this is just something to think about.
- Note on Secondary Trauma/Turnover – caring for workers.
  - This is something that counties really need to pay attention to. Someone does need to look out for the workers, they are more and more becoming second shift workers, and can't see their own families and some counties are struggling with flex time and making it work.
  - Some counties have managed to reduce turnover with the recruitment and retention materials.

- This topic may be put on the agenda at another MRS meeting.

### CFT Policy

Policy should be on-line very soon – won't get a hard copy yet because there is so much new policy coming out.

- Families were involved in creating this definition.
- Matthew Jones and his mom speak on their experiences with CFTs. He was having mental health issues leading to troubles with school and he was not invested in CFTs but what made him decide to give it a try was that he was able to choose the location and he could bring a friend of his to the meeting. He also did not want the school to be there because he had to be there all day and he was sick of them. Even though the school was where he was having issues, they let him not invite them to the first meeting, and after the first one, he was convinced it would help to have them there. It also came out at the meeting that his dream was to have his own business. So they started talking to him about what would be needed to have his own business, a drivers license, and math skills, so he saw a investment in school on his own and both mental health and the school got their needs met without forcing themselves on the family.
- Definition - Child and Family Teams are family members and their community supports that come together to create, implement and update a plan *with* the child, youth and family. The plan builds on the strengths of the child, youth and family and addresses their needs, desires and dreams.
- CFT meetings in Assessment
  - Not required, unless a petition is going to be filed during assessment, and the child's safety is not compromised by the holding of a meeting
  - Can be used for safety planning
  - Special care needs to be taken to be clear with all participants, that while there is an ongoing assessment, in which much information will be gathered, this is not the purpose of this meeting
  - Initial preparation for CFT should always begin in Assessment
- CFT in In-Home Services
  - Whenever a Service Agreement is due
  - When the family requests one
  - Critical Decisions
  - *Prior to case closure for repeat recipients of In-Home Services*
  - Don't forget those collaterals!!
- Foster Care and Adoption
  - Any time a Service Agreement and/or a PPAT is due
  - At the family's request
  - Critical decisions (return home, placement change)
  - Should address concurrent plans
  - Will continue after reunification is ceased, team *may* change, but meetings should continue

- For children whose parents are no longer involved, the child should be consulted as to who they see as their supports and these choices should be honored
- Combining CFT and PPAT (and others)
  - The critical point here is the inclusion of GAL and Community Rep. Hold discussion with family to ascertain if they will agree to this.
  - We all know how precious time is; with a little planning and collaboration other meetings may be able to be rolled into a CFT.
- Preparation
  - Early and often
  - Prepare *all* participants
  - Developing team
  - Safety issues
  - Identifying non-negotiables
  - Time, place, cultural touches
  - Focus/goal of meeting
  - Ground rules
  - Absent parents
  - Mentor/support person
  - Involving children—Not an “if”, but a “how”
- Looking Inward
  - What are your personal feelings about the issues
  - How might they influence you
  - How can you assure that you leave them at the door
- Looking Outward
  - Building relationships with community partners
  - Developing informal resources
  - Educate partners
  - Ask for what you need!
- Special Considerations
  - DV cases
  - Older youth with no, or “hidden” family
- Facilitator
  - Must be used in High and Intensive risk cases
  - Not a part of the team—no opinion
  - May keep notes
  - May help with prep
- What's Important for documentation
  - Developing the team
  - Preparing all team members
  - Who was invited/who attended
  - Special features
  - Ideas of all team members
  - How one strategy was chosen over another
  - Child involvement
  - Absent parents

- Culture
  - Not a checklist
- Training

### CFT Observations

Nicole from Duke talked about the tool. It was developed by the Psych Department at University of Washington. Duke has selected 5 counties where they will be observing the CFT meetings. They will observe 5 meetings in the first 6 months of the fiscal year, then provide feedback, give counties a chance to evaluate feedback, and then do 5 more.

- This is something that counties can use themselves if they are not one of the 5. Nicole did a mini training, but can provide more if an individual county would like further information.
- Organized around 10 principles with 3-5 questions for each one. (family voice and choice, team based, natural supports, collaboration, community based, culturally competent, individualized, strengths based, persistence, outcome based).
- Counties can use this tool to assess county level CFTs, identify strengths, areas for improvement, etc.
- Duke will be developing a database to record this information and could provide a copy of their database (not the data, but the database itself) so that counties could track their own performance.

### Moving Forward with MRS

This is nebulous to get your heads around. We have been statewide for about 2 years. There are still areas in each county where things could go deeper. May be following policy to the letter but not the spirit. How can we move forward?

- Need some practical, not policy, training on some things. Counties have not been able to get to trainings that are out there (i.e. Shared Parenting) because they have turnover and can only afford to have the staff out to have the required trainings. Also feel that trainings are not offered close – however everyone feels this way (west feels like training is more frequent in the east and the east feels like training is more frequent in the west.) Have talked about training issues in past meetings (see notes).
- Still struggling with cross-jurisdiction issues. Need to emphasize that these principles and practices are not only for families, but also for working with colleagues.
- Still having trouble with buy-in from community partners (law enforcement, health department.)
  - Be aware that there is training available through NC State where you can get the entire community trained. (You can also get this by contacting your LME System of Care coordinator.) This is always trained with a NC State staff and a family partner who has been through CFTs so that is a strength of the training. Also, since your entire community can go, everyone hears the same thing at the same time instead of a DSS training, versus a MH training, etc.

- What if we could not have this meeting anymore? What if travel restrictions come about or the counties just cannot afford it, what would work?
  - Rotating around helps a lot rather than when we used to have them in Wilson and Greensboro.
  - Group here recognized that electronics are the new thing, but think that the meetings are much more beneficial in person.
- Counties said they really hoped that we would not discontinue this meeting. Even if some counties can't come some times, they come in general and the meetings are useful.

September Meetings:

Central: Orange County – September 17<sup>th</sup>

Western: AB Tech September date TBA

Eastern: Onslow – September 30<sup>th</sup>